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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ I Thought It Was Spring ~ Parents Monitor Kids! ~ The "Pirate Code"
~ Fewer Using P2P Systems ~ Plenty Titles for PSP! ~ Xbox Supply Short

-* Yahoo Ups E-mail Storage! *-
-* Yahoo Lawyers Ask Court Protection! *-
-* What Are the Web's Worst Security Problems *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

"-----"

You know that I'm going to complain! While it's true that the calendar says that it's now Spring, look out the window. More snow this week! We moved up a notch in the record books for the most snow for winter, to third place. Over seven feet of snow...so far. Fortunately, in my immediate area, we didn't get the foot or so of snow that was predicted. If I saw correctly, Joe's area got walloped much more than we did! We may have got an inch or two before the temperatures rose, and whatever fell overnight melted or got washed away during a brief shower. Nonetheless, I'm still sick of this weather. I'm really in the mood for sunshine and warmth!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. You're probably sick of hearing me talk about how Mother Nature sticking it to us here in the northeast again, but she's up to her old tricks again. We had us a little snow storm yesterday. It's late in the year for that kind of thing, and most of us really wish she'd ease up on us a bit.

Of course, we'll probably be thinking fondly of this storm sometime in July or August, so I guess everything works out.

The other thing I want to mention... without really mentioning it is this current "right to life" thing and the continual tug of war over it.

Now, I've got my own fairly strong opinions on this particular subject, but my personal opinion isn't what I'm talking about here. It's the tug of war part that we've got to get a handle on.

It may just be because I'm getting older (not OLD, just older), but I see more and more of the "might makes right" mindset all around us, and it's

starting to worry me. The continual back-and-forth is a sure sign that we're starting to see not only the law but social mores as... oh, as 'The Pirate Code'... "They're more like guidelines anyway".

If a state court, fully empowered to rule on a subject, decides against your position, no problem. Simply enlist the help of a Governor or President or House Majority Leader and transfer jurisdiction to a federal court. If that doesn't work? Hey, just cloud the issue with sound bytes and whatever hearsay you can muster.

Now, none of that is what's really bothering me. What bothers me most is that those with some considerable amount of power and/or prestige feel that they can grab on to an issue and wrangle it around so that they not only get some exposure, but that they seem to be in-the-know without actually having any firsthand knowledge. Now, if you've been within 25 feet of a newspaper, radio or television in the past two weeks, you know not only what I'm talking about, but who.

I wish that I could say that I was surprised by these occurrences, but the truth is that I am not. As I said before, I'm seeing the contentiousness building more and more, not only on the national and international scenes, but on the community level as well.

I know that this particular issue is a tricky one, with more sides to it than the Pentagon, but I'm not sure that that's the most important point here. It's possible that the really important point is something that a philosopher put into words so well once upon a time: Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Well, that's enough of that. Let's get on with the news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

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'Gianfranco' asks about what to install first on his new Atari computers:

"I'm one of the many Atari enthusiasts around the world. Years ago I started out with a 2600, then I owned a few of the 8-bit models, and then the ST line. I think I'm not the only one here with such a past.

I recently managed to acquire a MegaSTE, a TT and a Falcon 030 (in a rack) with lots of accessories. I think I managed to pay good prices (10 euros for the MegaSTE with laser printer+b/w monitor, 25 euros for a TT with Megafiler 44 and a SCSI cd-rom reader, 31 euros for the Falcon with built-in hard disk and VGA adapter)...

I'd like to put the TT and Falcon back to work. I have lots of ST software on my PC, but I don't know where to start from. So my question is: in your opinion, what software should I install on the TT/Falcon (desktop replacements, utilities, etc)? Not looking for games, but for all the things that make the ST line more pleasant to use.

For example, what do I need for the TT/Falcon to "see" the SCSI CD-Rom reader?

Also, I read that it's possible to connect a TT or Falcon to an

ethernet router by using a Dayna SCSI Pocket Link, which I have. Has anybody done it? Is it easy to configure?

I'd love to have my two beloved "beasts" (which I couldn't afford when they were raging) up and running again. Unfortunately time is tight, at the moment, and I need your suggestions."

Joseph Place tells Gianfranco:

"I use the Dayna SCSI Link T, and it works great. STing IP stack only though, so you should decide what OS you will use first (Mint or Magic, etc.). I use it with TOS or Magic with great results."

Gianfranco tells Joseph:

"it's interesting to find someone having done what I'll be trying to do soon.

I know very little about Sting/Mint/Magic.

What do you mean by "STing IP stack only though, so you should decide what OS you will use first"? Do I need to use Sting with a TOS replacement? What are the differences between Mint and Magic?

Thanks for sharing your experience."

Gianfranco adds:

"The Falcon I purchased came with Mint installed (in German), and I decided to leave it there.

I understand my question was very general. I have STing 1.26 and the Anodyne drivers on the Falcon now. Unfortunately time is too tight (I can only work on my hobbies at night) that I'm afraid it will take me weeks to have it up and running.

Thank you (and to Derryck and Jim) for your help. I'll keep you updated on my progress (and ask more questions, obviously).

Today I tried to connect the Dayna SCSI link to the Falcon. Like an idiot, I had not realized that I didn't have the right cable. I have the original Dayna cable which has a Mac-style HDI-30 scsi connector on one side and a db-25 connector on the other side.

As I (obviously) need to buy a proper cable, can you please tell me what kind of SCSI connector the Falcon has? I believe I can recognize the right cable when I see it, but I'd like to know the exact "name" of the connector just to be sure I'll not buy the wrong one."

Joseph tells Gianfranco:

"It's a SCSI 2 connector. If you have other devices to connect to the chain you may want to consider a SCSI 2 to SCSI 1 adapter. I've found that most of the devices I want to connect use the SCSI 1 standard, and legacy Apple gear is pretty easy to come by that has SCSI 1."

Jim DeClercq jumps in and adds:

"I think a SCSI 2 connector is also called a HP50, probably short for Hewlett Packard. They appear on one old SCSI box I have, a genuine Sun box on E-bay at the moment, and on the very last external SCSI CD writer box from Yamaha.

It has squeeze latches to hold it in place. If it has screws or wire ears, it is not what I think of as SCSI2.

My Falcon manual is at home, and I am not."

Coda adds:

"I believe that its a HD50, HD for High Density. SCSI1 uses 50 pin connectors too, in a big centronics style connector (a longer version of the connector on a printer) Strictly speaking SCSI-2 is also about the command set and electrical spec. If Uwe S. is around he can clarify this as I'm not 'au fait' with the technical aspects, I just know how to plug em together..."

Derryck Croker tells Gianfranco about...

"The ideal system:

Magic (6.20 is the latest) as your operating system
jinnee (desktop replacement)
NVDI (screen accelerator/font handling/print drivers)
HDDriver (hard disk driver)
Extendos (CDROM driver)

That will give you a system that will be able to handle the more up-to-date software such as Tempus Word, Papyrus, Calamus SL2003 and so on.

If you can afford an accelerator card for your Falcon so much the better; a CT2 or better a CT60 will also let you add more memory.

My Falcon worked very well with a parallel-port ethernet adaptor with a ROM-port adaptor with MagxNet."

David Wade asks about Anodyne drivers and HDDriver:

"I recently acquired a couple of Falleron SCSI/Ethernet adaptors which appear to be re-badged DynaLink boxes. Indeed when I try them with the demo version of HDDRIVER 8 they are seen by the DynaLink Sting driver as such. However it then bombs out!. I can think of a number of reasons why this might happen. Firstly the driver says it has "problems" with HD Driver 8 and needs V7, but this seems very terminal. Secondly it might be because the demo of HDDRIVER 8 does not implement a function that the DynaLink driver needs, thirdly it could be because I am loading the driver from floppy and I know it clashes with floppy access and lastly it could be because my DynaLink box is duff. In view of what I paid from them I strongly suspect the latter, and so I am a little reluctant to buy HD Driver before I am sure they work. So to the questions:-

- 1) Has any one tried the AnoDyne drivers with HDDriver V8 and is my experience expected.
- 2) Is there a demo of HDDRIVER V7 available, and does the SCSI Driver function in this work so I can test the boxes.
- 3) Has any one got these drivers to work with any other hard disk driver?"

Brian Roland asks David:

"Is this a Falcon?

In my personal experience...

If you use only IDE devices on a Falcon, go with HDDriver 8.

If you use SCSI...Ask for version 7.93.

Actually, the SCSI engine in HDDriver 8 is supposedly better/cleaner...but Falcons are strange from bird to bird...and...so much of the older software, CuBase Audio for instance, broke all kinds of rules to get around hardware related problems that they'll often choke up with HDDriver 8. The good news is...Version 7.93 is very close to a dead match 'feature wise' to his younger brothers, so you shouldn't miss many, if any, 'features' offered by his younger brothers.

My Dynalink/Falcon setup works great with clients...

I've not had much luck getting it to be stable running servers however.

Perhaps you'll have better luck with server software than I have."

Uwe Seimet asks David:

"Did you ask Anodyne for details, i.e. why their drivers do not work with HDDRIVER 8?

I can send you a demo of HDDRIVER 7 tomorrow if you give me an email address I should send the binary to."

David tells Uwe:

"I have, but no reply received. Because of the time difference I don't expect one until later.."

Uwe sends David the 7.9 version and David tells us:

" Just to let you all know that I now have a Farallon EtherMac SCSI box working on my TT030. I am using the demo version of HDDRIVER 7.90 that Uwe very kindly sent me and the Anodyne DynaLink driver. They are very neat and it seems to give good performance but testing is not yet complete. All I need to do now is get in touch with Atari Workshop and get a real copy of the English version of the full version of HDDRIVER v7.90."

Ronald Hall asks for help in locating one of my favorite ST apps:

"I guess I'm having one of my stupid days, but every time I go to

Didier's web site, for the life of me, I can't find the download link for the latest version of Aniplayer.

I can find the docs, screenshots, etc, etc, etc, but not the actual download link. Can someone point out the obvious to this temporary brain-dead person?"

Jean-Luc Ceccoli tells Ronald:

"Maybe <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/didierm/files/aniplay.zip> is what you're looking for?

In fact, when you're on the main page, click on to the download link, then you reach a page with Didier's software..."

Well friends and neighbors, that's it for this week. Enjoy the holiday weekend and don't forget to tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

=~=-=~-

->In This Week's Gaming Section - Playstation Portable Available!

Plenty of PSP Titles!
Xbox in Short Supply!
And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Sony PSP Launches in North America

With hype and fanfare usually reserved for a movie premiere, die hard video game fans formed large lines Thursday to buy Sony Corp.'s tiny new PlayStation Portable.

At the Sony Style store in New York, "Last Call" host Carson Daly joined Sony executives for a midnight madness event. Hundreds lined up at Sony's Metreon store in San Francisco to pick up the hot gadget, while midnight launches or early openings were held at most of Grapevine, Texas-based retailer GameStop's 1,800 outlets.

The PSP, Sony's first foray into portable video game machines, features

stereo sound and a sharp, 4.3-inch color screen. Sony hopes the PSP can appeal to more than gamers with its ability to play movies, music and show pictures.

The \$250 "Value Pack" which went on sale across North America on Thursday includes extras like a memory card, carrying case and a copy of the full-length movie "Spider-Man 2" on the system's proprietary, 1.8-gigabyte media discs.

Mike Yacullo, 36, pre-ordered a PSP in January to make sure he'd get one on time. It arrived Thursday morning, along with several games.

"I actually never owned a Sony video game before, but this one pushed me over the edge," the programmer from Jersey City, N.J. said. "I'm really, really impressed. The graphics are excellent, the screen is really bright. It's better than I thought it would be."

Sony made 1 million PSPs available for Thursday's North American launch; the company has sold more than 1.2 million in Japan since December. Sony plans to increase production to 2 million units per month by the middle of next year.

The PSP and the DS from Nintendo Co. are expected to buoy the global portable games market from \$3.9 billion in 2003 to \$11.1 billion in 2007, according to market research firm DFC Intelligence.

The PSP already has enjoyed some celebrity cachet, making the rounds at a Hollywood fashion show last week that included PSP accessories from top fashion designers like Marc Jacobs, Heatherette, Jenni Kayne and Jennifer Lopez.

And at least one person broke the law to get a PSP early.

A man in Charlotte, N.C., reportedly made off Tuesday with 12 PSPs he stole from a GameStop store. Police said when a clerk confronted him, he tried to knock her eyeglasses off.

With a New Toy, Plenty of Titles to Play

Sony is launching its PlayStation Portable handheld with an unusually large spread of titles. Most new game systems ship with only a handful of games, but Sony says 24 will be available for the PSP when it shows up in stores Thursday.

That selection includes a good variety of game genres as well as publishers - there's something for just about everyone who is interested enough in video games to shell out \$250 for a PSP.

Sony is backing up its portable gadget with a strong group of its own action titles, all priced at \$40. Ape Escape: On the Loose, an action game that challenges players to capture monkeys in various situations, looks notably better than the original PlayStation title. Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade is a surprisingly deep dungeon crawler that throws in magic and quests. Twisted Metal: Head-On adds a chapter to the car-combat series, with 16 environments, beautiful graphics and local as well as Internet multiplayer capability.

On the sports front, Sony offers MLB, NBA, Gretzky NHL and World Tour Soccer. NBA is our favorite of those four; not only does it look extraordinary, it offers some creative added features, such as a set of three mini-games that let you work on particular skills. World Championship Soccer, however, was the worst of this bunch, on account of its stiff animations and repetitive commentary. MLB, NBA and Gretzky NHL can all be played online as well as over local "ad hoc" wireless networks, but World Tour Soccer only allows local competition.

Electronic Arts, the biggest developer in the industry, is making PSP versions of most of its best-known PS2 sports titles. Its best effort is NBA Street Showdown, thanks to a solid set of features topped by a highly addictive Arcade Shootout. Tiger Woods PGA Tour, another great title, uses the same swing mechanic as the PS2 version (here, the PSP's analog stick allows precise control of timing and strength) and lets you play along golf greats such as Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer on 12 beautiful PGA courses. Football fans should try NFL Street 2: Unleashed for some incredibly fast gridiron action. FIFA Soccer 2005 does far better than Sony's World Tour Soccer.

Unfortunately, none of these EA releases allow Internet play - any multiplayer competition will require another PSP owner to show up within 100 feet or so. EA also charges \$50 each for its titles, \$10 more than other publishers.

In the racing genre, EA's Need for Speed Underground: Rivals should appeal to car tuners, who can find plenty of distraction in its 8 game modes (two not available in the PS2 release), 20 cars and a plethora of subsequent customization options. Sony's ATV Offroad Fury provides an alternative for people who don't enjoy driving between the white lines. But the best PSP racing game is Namco's Ridge Racer (\$40). No other game shows off the PSP's capabilities as well overall. The sensation of speed is remarkable, and multiplayer races (local only, not online) can have you hooked for hours.

No game system is complete without some sort of Tony Hawk skateboarding game, so Activision offers Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix (\$50). It's not its best effort, suffering from an inflexible in-game perspective; a good WiFi multiplayer setup does make up for some of that.

We don't list Konami's Metal Gear Acid (\$40) under the action category because this installment of the Solid Snake series doesn't play like its predecessors. It's a turn-based card battle game, not a re-creation of one guy with a lot of guns sneaking into places where he's not allowed. After we got over the shock and mastered how these cards work, we had a hard time putting this strategy-intense game down.

Puzzle gamers don't have a great selection yet on the PSP, but Ubisoft's Lumines (\$40) should keep them distracted for a while with its habit-forming Tetris-esque design.

Only one fighting game is available, and it's not related to any of the great fighting series, such as Tekken or Mortal Kombat. Capcom's Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower (\$40) does, however, stand on its own with some stellar graphics and a great multiplayer system that allows for four-person WiFi tournaments.

Xbox consoles were in short supply at several major retail outlets recently due to unexpectedly high demand for the video game machines, Microsoft Corp. said on Monday.

The world's largest software maker, which launched the Xbox in 2001 to rival Sony Corp.'s PlayStation consoles, said that "consumer demand is exceeding supply right now... we are working with partners to rectify the situation."

"We're working really hard to satiate (consumers') needs," a Microsoft spokeswoman said.

Microsoft said that holiday sales of its Xbox console exceeded expectations during the last three months of 2004, and in January raised its sales forecast to a global installed base of 21 million to 22 million consoles by June, up from the previous projection of 20 million units.

Earlier on Monday, Electronic Arts, the world's largest video game publisher, cut its quarterly earnings outlook on weak performance of older games and shortages of game consoles that spur new game sales.

God of War

Hades lets you unleash the souls of the underworld; and Artemis actually provides you with a huge sword to use as an alternative to the blades of chaos. Along with the blades of chaos, all these weapons and magic types can be upgraded via the red orbs you collect, providing you with greater attack range and more power each time. Each of the different types of magic is useful in its own right, and none feels superfluous at all. Quite the opposite is true, actually. The combination of different magics, along with the weapon combat, creates an excellent variety of attacks that turn Kratos into a serious force to be reckoned with.

The combat system is a ton of fun, despite not being the deepest system you'll ever encounter.

And he'll need to be, too, as God of War is not light on challenge. Make no mistake, if you're expecting some kind of excruciating level of difficulty, you won't find it...at least not on the default level. The hard mode, which is immediately available, will definitely provide you with a stiffer challenge. Still, even with that said, the game is no pushover on the normal difficulty level, thanks largely to the wide variety of tough and creatively designed enemies. Each of the game's baddies is based on a creature from Greek mythology. You'll find cyclopes, gorgons, minotaurs, undead warriors, and winged harpies, among others, on offer. Though some of these enemies amount to mere grunts that can be cut through reasonably quickly, the game tends to throw lots of them at you, meaning you'll need to be quick with your attacks and well versed at using the block mechanic.

Some larger enemies, while fully beatable via normal combos, are more easily bested by engaging in one of God of War's many context-sensitive attacks. When an enemy that can be killed by one of these attacks appears - once you've worn it down, that is - a button icon will appear above its head. Hit the button and you'll find yourself engaged in something of a rhythm-based minigame. Each time a new button icon (or in

some cases, an icon dictating a specific rotation of the left analog stick) appears, pressing it quickly will cause Kratos to pull off a new maneuver. Others still simply require button mashing to simulate a struggle between Kratos and an enemy. There are loads of these different contextual actions in the game, and they're all fantastic. They truly do a wonderful job of making you feel like you're right in the thick of the action, rather than just having you sit through a cutscene of your character doing something cool.

Yes, that's a flaming minotaur you're fighting. Yes, he's as tough as he looks.

The boss fights are where the game really shines, however. Though there are really only a scant few major boss fights, each boss is unique in its own way, and each requires quite a lot of quick attacking and footwork to beat. From the multiheaded hydra that guards the end of the first stage, to the god of war himself, you'll never fail to feel challenged and shouldn't be bored with any of the game's boss fights. The final confrontation, in particular, is immensely satisfying and well done. We obviously won't give away what happens, but let's just say it does the age-old concept of the "multitiered" final boss battle extremely proud.

When you're not slicing up zombie warriors and cyclopes, you'll likely be involved in solving one of the game's numerous puzzles. As this is a game set in ancient Greek times, the puzzles are modeled after some of the types of ancient traps, pitfalls, and mazes that were legendary in Greek mythology. Mechanically, a lot of the puzzles involve turning cranks, pulling levers, repositioning statues and blocks onto big, stone switches, and what have you. However, what really makes the puzzles in God of War impressive is the scope of each one. For instance, when you first arrive inside the massive Pandora's temple on your search for the box, you'll find yourself in this large, circular room. You'll find a switch that actually rotates the room and brings up new doorways that were previously hidden. As you progress, you'll open up more doorways, find yourself rotating the rooms around and around, and eventually solve about a billion small puzzles to finally solve the big one that gets you out of the big, ringed room. This will likely take you at least a couple of hours, but what a feeling of accomplishment you'll have by the end of it. And that right there is what makes the puzzles in God of War so good. By the end of each one, you truly feel like you've accomplished something significant.

One of the major pitfalls of single-player action adventure games is that once you're done, there's never really much incentive to go back to them. Maybe there's an unlockable extra here and there, but usually it's 10 hours, and you're done. This is not so much the case with God of War. On the normal difficulty level, it will probably take you a good 15 hours or so to work your way through the whole game, but once you do, you unlock a bevy of extra material, including a number of behind-the-scenes videos (the "deleted levels" one, where the game's director, David Jaffe, shows you some of the levels that didn't make it into the final game, is especially cool), a challenging minigame, and a new difficulty level, titled "god mode." God mode is precisely the kind of hard that masochistically hardcore players will eat up, and it's precisely the kind of hard that will lead to an average player tying a controller around his or her neck just before leaping out of a window. However, if you beat the game on god mode (as unlikely as that may be), you get even more bonus materials. Considering the game is so much fun to play on the average difficulty, it's not hard to imagine people braving the god mode to get a second play-through out of it. All told, God of War amounts to a pretty great value, even if you're too frightened to brave the god mode.

The morbid tone of the game permeates everything, from the level designs to the very puzzles you must solve.

What God of War does best of all is create a fun yet dark atmosphere. The game seems to be heavily inspired by a mixture of traditional Greek mythology with some modern horror and a little bit of adventure-metal thrown in for good measure. All the various creatures you encounter are the kind of grotesque monsters you'd expect, but they aren't just generic-looking cyclopes or minotaurs either. Each has its own distinct style that adds some originality to the mix. There are also so many little artistic touches strewn about that help the vibe of the game immensely. When you encounter a particularly brutal trap or pitfall, you don't just see the trap, but you also see piles of bodies tossed about, seemingly there to warn you of the peril that lies ahead. Even the puzzles get in on this sort of morbid tone, as is the case with one puzzle where you must carry a caged soldier up a hill to a sacrificial altar to open a door. All the while, he's kicking and screaming and begging for mercy. But, hey, you've got to get somewhere, dammit. If you find this sort of thing unpleasant, then you probably will be put off by God of War's overall tone. If you can find the dark humor in something like this, however, then you'll absolutely love this game's atmosphere.

With that said, this is also a deservedly M-rated game. Blood is the name of the game in God of War, and from cutscenes to in-game action, you'll spill a whole lot of it as you go. For some, it might be a little bit much, but if you enjoy some good gore, God of War absolutely does not disappoint. The one area where the game does feel a little off in terms of its sense of "maturity" is with the sort of random flirtations with sexuality that appear from time to time. Mostly, it's just a few benign scenes of bare-breasted women that are hardly worth noting, but there is one sequence where you can actually engage in one of the contextual minigames to have sex with a pair of women. You don't see any of it on camera, and it's actually done in sort of a comical fashion, with just a framed shot of a jar on a table continually bumping around until it finally falls off the table and breaks at the end. Most people probably won't be offended by this at all - it's just kind of a goofy aside to the otherwise dark tone of the game--but it does seem a little out of place.

Sorry, bud. Sacrifices have to occasionally be made in the name of opening locked doors.

Greece, as shown through the eyes of the game, is a pretty fantastic place. Even the most mundane aspects of the city of Athens seem impressive in scope, and when you get to levels like the huge, sandstorm-filled desert and the massive Pandora's temple (which happens to be chained to the back of a humongous titan), it's pretty hard to not be floored by how cool it all looks. Though the levels are fairly linearly designed, there are plenty of opportunities for exploration, so you'll find all sorts of little hidden health bonuses and tunnels if you just take the time to look. Even without the exploratory elements, the levels just look so impressive, thanks mostly to the way the game's fixed cinematic camera moves. As cinematic cameras go, this is really one of the best ones ever designed, as it almost never, ever trips you up at all, and it always seems to frame the most impressive shot available. Occasionally it would be nice to be able to move the camera, but as it is, the way God of War captures the action with its camera is quite impressive.

Even from a technical perspective, God of War really carries its weight, making excellent use of the PS2 hardware's capabilities. The best part of

the game is the animation, which is practically seamless, no matter what you do. The developers evidently went out of their way to make sure every possible scenario was animated in a realistic fashion. As a result, you won't find any herky-jerky movements between getting hit and going into another combo move. Everything transitions beautifully, and save for a few glitches you might run into here and there (most of which are minor), this game is just about as polished up as polished up gets. There are practically no loading times (save for a few brief ones), sporadically every changeover from level to level is totally seamless. The only real technical issues you might run into involve the frame rate, which has an occasional tendency to hitch up during some very specific scenarios. Generally, the game can handle a lot of enemies onscreen at once, but if you couple a lot of enemies with, say, a water-covered ground surface, then things get a smidge choppy; but even when this does happen, it's never much of a problem, and it's really just a minor blemish on an otherwise excellent-looking game.

See that building chained to the back of that big, ugly thing? Yeah, you need to get up there.

The audio may, in fact, be God of War's greatest achievement, both technically and stylistically. The orchestral score is simply one of the best ever put onto a console game, mixing energetic, epic music - the likes of which compares to any top-grade Hollywood production - with low-key, ethereal tones that set the mood for the quieter moments of the game wonderfully. All the music is placed so well within the context of the game that you'll never see a moment where something doesn't fit. It's just phenomenal stuff. The voice acting is almost as good, too. Kratos is voiced to near perfection, providing the kind of gruff, guttural delivery that such a hardened warrior would demand. Even the side characters pull off their characters wonderfully. However, the narrator is perhaps the best of all. The story is told by an elderly village oracle, and her tone is so perfect for the role that you're instantly sucked in the moment she begins to speak. Even the sound effects really couldn't conceivably be better. Every sword slash, every splash of blood, and every roar of a monster feels just as it should. To sum it all up, you just couldn't ask for a better audio experience from this game.

When all is said and done, God of War is simply a high-class production in every single facet of its package. From the finely balanced gameplay, to the magnificent presentation, to the great roster of unlockable extras, you can't help but be impressed by what this game has to offer. It's simply a marvelously executed experience that's fun from beginning to end, and anyone with a taste for mature content and the action adventure genre would be foolish to pass it up.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
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What Are the Web's Worst Security Problems?

A new report released by security company Symantec found that incidents of online identity theft scams, also known as "phishing attacks," skyrocketed in the second half of 2004, as did spam and new software vulnerabilities. But other Internet blights, such as zombie networks of compromised computers, or "bots," actually declined.

The number of phishing e-mail messages intercepted by Symantec grew 300 percent since June 2004, while spam e-mail traffic intercepted by Symantec increased by 77 percent and reports of serious software vulnerabilities grew by 13 percent, according to the Symantec Internet Security Threat Report. Online fraud may be driving many of the trends, as attackers turn to strategies that are useful for identity theft and other online scams, says Alfred Huger, senior director of engineering at Symantec Security Response.

The Symantec Internet Security Threat Report is a semi-annual report that brings together data from Symantec's global DeepSight network, customer networks, and networks of decoy servers and e-mail accounts that the company maintains.

Symantec anti-fraud filters blocked 33 million phishing e-mail messages each week by the end of the year, compared with just 9 million a week in mid July. The problem is not likely to abate, as online criminals get more sophisticated about spoofing legitimate e-mail traffic, the report says.

Phishing scams use spam to direct Internet users to Web sites that are controlled by thieves, but are designed to look like legitimate e-commerce sites. Users are asked to provide sensitive information such as a password, bank account information, or a credit card number, often under the guise of updating an account.

The growth is part of a larger trend in fraud-related e-mail, says Huger. "We're seeing a financial motive behind the creation of malware," he says.

In all, Symantec noted a 64 percent increase in all types of malicious software, including viruses and Trojan horse programs in the period covered by the report, a number that excludes both spyware and adware, Huger says.

One exception to that trend was PCs belonging to zombie "bot" networks. After surging in the first half of the year, the number of computers in bot networks (or botnets) decreased, from more than 30,000 bot systems scanning the Internet each day in July to fewer than 5000 a day by the end of the year, Symantec says.

Symantec did not cite a reason for the reduction, but says that action to shut down bot activity by large, international Internet service providers and the release of Microsoft's Windows XP Service Pack 2 update could account for the decline. However, other explanations are possible, including a shift away from huge and persistent botnets, towards smaller networks that stay online for shorter periods, Symantec says.

Behind the scenes, there is still plenty of interest in bot software. The number of new variants for bot software increased dramatically in the period covered by the study. For example, Symantec collected 4288 unique variants of Spybot, a family of bot software, in the second half of the year - around 23 new variants of the software every day, Huger says.

"That's the biggest leap we've ever seen, and it tells us that people are

iterating the code to make it more successful, and also that there are more people in the game of writing [bot] variants," he says.

Bots and bot networks that are used in attacks for financial gain will continue to be a problem in the next six months, Symantec says. The company also predicted that worms and viruses that target vulnerabilities on software clients will become a bigger problem, and that attacks on mobile device platforms and the heretofore ignored Apple Computer's Mac operating system.

A growing number of software vulnerabilities are also fueling the rise in malicious code, Huger says.

Symantec documented more than 1403 new vulnerabilities between July 1, 2004 and December 31, 2004, an average of 54 vulnerabilities per week, compared with 48 per week in the first half of the year, Symantec says.

That growth is significant for companies that are already trying to compensate for a large number of vulnerabilities each day, Huger says.

Web applications were a rich new source of security holes, Symantec says. In the second half of 2004, 48 percent of all the vulnerabilities reported were found in Web applications, he says.

To address the growth in reported vulnerabilities, companies that develop software have to do a better job educating developers to write more secure code, Huger says.

Companies and individuals also need to follow "best practices," such as cutting of unneeded services, staying on top of software patches and enforcing password use, Symantec says.

Closing Arguments Begin in Kazaa Trial

The owners of global file-sharing company Kazaa told a court Wednesday they should not be held liable for copyright infringements by network users because the company cannot control how the software is used after it is downloaded.

A group of Australian record labels is suing the makers of Kazaa, Sharman Networks Ltd., and the company's directors in the Federal Court in Sydney for copyright infringements by the network's estimated 100 million members worldwide.

The record companies claim Kazaa users freely download up to 3 billion songs and music files each month, costing the industry millions of dollars in unpaid royalties.

In closing arguments Wednesday, lawyers for Sharman Networks acknowledged that some Kazaa users engage in illegal copying, but said the software's creators could not be held responsible.

Lawyer Tony Meagher told the court that once Kazaa was downloaded onto users' computers, the company had "no power to control" its use - just as the makers of photocopiers and video recorders could not control or be held responsible for illegal copying on their machines.

As a result, Meagher said, the main issue in the case was whether Kazaa, in effect, authorized its users to download copyright protected material.

"We tell these users in our Web site and we tell them in our license that they cannot use this (software) for infringing copyright," Meagher told Judge Murray Wilcox.

By consenting to the terms of the license agreement, the users were exempting Kazaa's owners from liability for copyright infringement, Meagher said.

Grinning, the judge interrupted Meagher's submission to ask if it was "unduly cynical" to assume that most people don't read software licensing agreements.

"One is entitled to use one's general experience that most people don't read through legal documents unless they regard them as critically important," Wilcox said.

Meagher responded that users were required to confirm that they had read the license agreements before using Kazaa to download any materials, copyright-protected or otherwise.

Lawyers for the record industry argue that Kazaa not only enables but encourages users to infringe copyright.

The lawyers also said the company collects information about its users that would enable them to control their use of the software.

Record industry lawyer Tony Bannon told the court that Sharman Networks monitors Kazaa users and sells information about them to advertisers, saying the company's claim that it had no control over the software was "completely mind boggling."

The record companies want Sharman Networks and its directors declared liable for copyright breach and loss of earnings in the civil case.

If they succeed, a case next year would likely set the damages the owners have to pay.

The trial, which is being heard before a judge with no jury, is expected to wrap up late Wednesday. A verdict is expected within six weeks.

Fewer Using Peer-To-Peer Systems

Use of peer-to-peer systems like Kazaa for sharing music and other files online has dropped as more Americans who use the Internet turn to such alternative methods as downloading files from a friend's iPod, a new study finds.

Though the percentage of Internet users who share files online has changed little over the past year, remaining at about 24 percent, fewer are using P2P systems. Twenty-one percent of current music downloaders say they still use P2P systems, compared with 31 percent in February 2004, according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project.

The study was released ahead of Tuesday's Supreme Court hearing on whether

operators of such systems can be held liable for what users do with the software.

Usage of paid services like iTunes has increased to 34 percent of current music downloaders, compared with 17 percent last year.

Overall, about half of the current music or video downloaders say they have used sources other than P2P or paid services. E-mail and instant messages were popular, as was taking files from someone else's iPod or other MP3 player.

Researchers warn, however, that survey respondents may be less likely to admit to using P2P systems because of the stigma associated with them. The recording industry has been aggressive at suing users, reaching settlements with many for thousands of dollars apiece.

The study is based on a random, telephone-based survey of 1,421 adult Internet users in the United States. It was conducted Jan. 13-Feb. 9 and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Utah Internet Porn Law May Face Challenge

Internet service providers that operate in Utah must offer customers a way to block porn sites under a law signed this week. ISPs complained that the law adds nothing to the fight against pornography, and said a legal challenge is likely.

"The market has already responded to this issue," said Pete Ashdown, president of Salt Lake-based XMission. "We have for many years provided an optional filter for our customers that they can turn on in Internet browsers."

The law requires ISPs to offer customers free software for blocking porn sites on a list maintained by the attorney general.

Republican state Rep. John Dougall said the measure he sponsored should help parents overwhelmed by advancing technology.

"Kids are much more savvy about what's going on than their parents," Dougall said.

An earlier version of the bill would have required ISPs to block sites based on numeric Internet addresses, but ISPs argued that approach would block benign sites as well because they often share addresses. A federal court has struck down a 2003 Pennsylvania law that took that approach.

Though the Utah law is watered down, it still "will very likely lead to a costly litigation," said the Washington D.C.-based Center for Democracy and Technology.

"We've been down this road in Pennsylvania," said Dave Baker, vice president for law and public policy at EarthLink Inc. "And if that law can be struck down on constitutional grounds, this one will almost certainly face challenges."

The Utah law also requires companies that build and maintain pornographic sites to label the content "harmful to minors." Failure to comply is

punishable by one year in prison and a \$2,500 fine.

Macintosh Hacker Attacks Are on the Rise

Hacker attacks on Apple Computer Inc.'s Macintosh OS X operating system, thought by many who use the Mac to be virtually immune to attack, are on the rise, according to a report from anti-virus software vendor Symantec Corp.

"Contrary to popular belief, the Macintosh operating system has not always been a safe haven from malicious code," said the report, which was issued on Monday.

"It is now clear that the Mac OS is increasingly becoming a target for the malicious activity that is more commonly associated with Microsoft and various Unix-based operating systems."

Many in the Macintosh computer community have long claimed that the Mac platform has been virtually immune to attack - unlike Microsoft Corp.'s Windows operating system, which runs on more than 90 percent of the world's personal computers.

The Macintosh operating system, the current version of which is based on the Unix operating system, has less than 5 percent of the global market for computer operating systems.

"All these platforms have vulnerabilities - it's a fact of life," said Gartner analyst Martin Reynolds. "The truth of the matter is that Mac is only a couple percentage points of (computer) shipments so it's not an interesting target."

Apple's recent introduction of the Mac mini, a \$500 computer sold without a display, keyboard or mouse, could actually increase the likelihood of more malicious software computer code targeting the Mac platform, Symantec said.

"The market penetration of Macintosh platforms will be accelerated by the much lower priced Mac mini, which may be purchased by less security-savvy users," the report said. "As a result, the number of vulnerabilities can be expected to increase, as will malicious activity that targets them."

An Apple spokesman was not immediately available to comment.

Symantec said that over the past year, it had documented 37 high-vulnerabilities - weaknesses that leave the system open to malicious software attacks - in Mac OS X. They "have been confirmed by the vendor, which, in the Apple case, almost always means that the company has released a patch."

A patch is a small piece of software designed to shore up a vulnerability or to fix other software glitches.

At the same time, the report said that while those vulnerabilities in the Mac operating system will increase, "they will likely be outnumbered in other operating systems for some time to come."

Yahoo Lawyers Ask Court for Protection

Lawyers for Yahoo Inc. asked a federal appeals court Thursday for legal protection for U.S.-based Internet portals whose content is protected by the First Amendment in the United States, but illegal in foreign countries.

Some of the judges acknowledged the need for a shield for American companies in such situations, but suggested it was premature in the case of Yahoo, which is challenging a fine levied by a Paris court four years ago for allowing the site's French users to buy and sell Nazi memorabilia, in violation of French law.

Yahoo asked the 11-judge panel of the San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Thursday to prevent the two French human rights groups that sued from collecting the fine - now at about \$15 million and growing by as much as \$15,000 per day.

But during 70 minutes of arguments, some judges noted that the French groups haven't tried to collect.

"Where's the beef? Why are we here?" asked Judge Ronald Gould.

Yahoo attorney Robert Vanderet said the human rights groups might try to collect, and that Yahoo isn't the only Internet portal that needs to know whether U.S. courts would shield American companies from being liable abroad for lawfully protected speech originating in America.

"Yahoo needs assurances that that order is not enforceable in the United States," Vanderet told the panel.

Yahoo's French subsidiary, yahoo.fr, complies with France's law, but a French judge ordered Sunnyvale-based Yahoo.com to strip Nazi paraphernalia from the portal's most popular site, yahoo.com. Yahoo did not appeal the French order, and instead sought protection in U.S. courts.

A San Jose federal judge in 2002 ruled Yahoo, as an American company, was not liable, and the human rights groups appealed. A three-judge 9th Circuit panel overturned the judge, saying he ruled prematurely, since France's Union of Jewish Students and the International Anti-Racism and Anti-Semitism League haven't acted on the French judgment. Yahoo then sought Thursday's rehearing before an 11-judge panel.

Judge Raymond Fisher speculated that Yahoo's case was premature, but acknowledged the implications for free speech. "They're seeking a remedy that is going to have a major impact in the United States," Fisher said.

Yahoo says its international subsidiaries comply with local laws, and said it's technologically impossible to censor its U.S. site for users in France.

Legal experts said if Yahoo can clarify its position in the United States, other U.S.-based Internet service providers also will understand their liabilities.

"Who has a right to exercise legal jurisdiction over content that's on the Web?" asked Jeffrey Pryce, an international lawyer from Washington, D.C. Suppose it was Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan, he asked. "It could get kind of frightening."

The human rights groups' attorney, E. Randol Schoenberg, said Yahoo has dramatically limited the Nazi material on its American site, and that his clients won't try to collect unless Yahoo reverts "to their old ways."

The appellate court can rule on the case at any time.

IBM Debuts New Anti-Spam Tool

In a move to expand its Internet security footprint, IBM has introduced a new anti-spam application aimed at corporations. Called "FairUCE," (Fair use of Unsolicited Commercial Email), the application helps filter and block spam by using identity management technology at the network level to analyze the domain identity of an e-mail.

Essentially, FairUCE traces an e-mail message back to its origin, thus mapping for the system the link between an e-mail domain, e-mail address and the computer from which it was sent, IBM explains. In this way, FairUCE is able to discern whether messages are arriving from a zombie computer, a bot device or a legitimate e-mail server.

"Spam has become a high priority security issue for businesses today," said Stuart McIrvine, director of corporate security strategy, IBM. "By creating a multi-layered defense that proactively repels spam at its source, companies can get ahead of spammers and malicious hackers who are always looking for new ways of penetrating I.T. systems through e-mail."

The new IBM system differs from traditional spam filters that scan the content of messages entering the network in that it blocks and eliminates e-mail from spammers who assume false identities.

The concept is reminiscent of IEFT's on-again, off-again anti-spam Sender ID proposal. (IEFT is the Internet body responsible for developing general proposals into working standards for the Web community.) Many viewed the anti-spam Sender ID proposal, which was sidelined over a dispute about patents, as the most likely way to curtail spam.

IBM's February IBM Global Business Security Index - the monthly report that measures the global security threat landscape - found that spam actually has decreased from 83.11 percent in January to 76.3 percent last month.

IBM introduced the monthly summary and trend analysis for its enterprise clients last October. It leverages Big Blue's Global Security Intelligence Services and provides a broader look at the dangers that affect a company's I.T. environment, David Mackey, director of security and intelligence services, told NewsFactor. It is, he says, "a holistic approach to I.T. risk management."

Yahoo Ups Free E-Mail Storage to 1 GB

Yahoo Inc. said on Wednesday it will soon begin giving users of its free Web e-mail service 1 gigabyte of storage, four times more than it now offers, amid intense competition.

Consumers are increasingly using their Web e-mail inboxes as a repository for e-mail as well as digital photos and documents. Web e-mail providers have been responding with offers of ever more free storage.

Yahoo, which Nielsen//NetRatings said in February boasted the most unique users among e-mail providers in the United States ahead of Time Warner Inc.'s AOL and Microsoft Corp.'s MSN Hotmail, said the global storage upgrade will begin in late April and take about two weeks to complete.

The Internet media company also said it is beefing up antivirus protection for free e-mail users, giving them the ability to remove viruses from attachments - a feature that had only been available to paying users.

Yahoo Mail is available in 15 languages in almost two dozen countries around the world.

Google Inc. last spring was the first email provider to offer 1 gigabyte of free storage to users of its invitation-only test Gmail service, setting off me-too moves from rivals.

Gmail, a distant fourth in the rankings of top e-mail destinations, is now available only as an English-language service.

Microsoft currently limits free storage on its free MSN Hotmail accounts to 250 megabytes.

Yahoo and Microsoft each offer 2 gigabytes of storage to users who pay about \$20 per year for the service.

Teens Need To Use 'Filter Between Their Ears' On Web

Almost two-thirds of parents admit to monitoring which Web sites their teenagers visit, according to a survey released by the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

But Parry Aftab, an online privacy expert and advocate for child safety, says parental snooping into teens' Web surfing should be reserved for situations in which they may be at risk, not a common practice. It's better to talk to teens about their Web habits, make them aware of the online risks such as sexual predators and cyberbullying, and limit the time they spend online, she says.

"Don't snoop, not unless you've got a child who's at high risk. Then you don't have a choice," says Aftab, who is founder and executive director of WiredKids.org, a Web site that promotes online safety for kids, and TeenAngels.org, an affiliated site for teen volunteers who educate their peers about safe surfing. High-risk teens include drug users or those known to meet with strangers they originally met online. Aftab also is a columnist who writes about privacy issues on InformationWeek.com.

Aftab recommends parents install Web-monitoring software such as SpectorSoft Corp.'s Spector application, which records E-mail, instant messaging, screenshots, and key strokes, in addition to Web sites visited. But she says parents should only review the information collected as a last resort. If a teen is missing and foul play suspected, the monitoring software can reveal whom he or she may have been communicating with online.

"It's like the security video camera in the corner of the coffee shop," Aftab says.

Given the potential dangers, teens need to learn how to use good judgment when using the Web and other electronic media, including online games and cell phones. Aftab says the "filter between their ears" is more important than Web-filtering software on a PC.

"The newest issue is cyberbullying," Aftab says. "It ranges from 'I hate you' [messages] to taking your head and putting it on a pornographic image." Aftab's organization has created a Web site, StopCyberBullying.org, to educate kids and parents about the threat.

When a parent recently told Aftab that his daughter had established "many" screen names for instant messaging, Aftab said it was a warning sign the girl was being harassed. She advised the parent to confront the daughter about potential problems and insist that she reduce those online IDs.

Practicing online safety is equally important for preteens, Aftab says. "We have to focus on the middle schoolers," she says. "It's crucial that kids understand what they should and shouldn't do in connection with the new technology tools."

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